



Please support funding for Solar Youth!

Solar Youth promotes Youth Empowerment through
Environmental Exploration & Leadership!

SOLAR YOUTH'S MISSION, developed by founding youth and adults, is to provide opportunities for young people to develop a **positive sense of self** and **connection and commitment to others** through programs that incorporate **environmental exploration, leadership development and community service**.

In order to have a truly transformational impact on the lives of the youth we serve – the most at-risk in New Haven – Solar Youth has created a menu of programs called the **“Cycle of Stewardship”** for youth ages 4-19 that are designed to allow youth to progressively build on their experiences over time, gaining **critical personal and social competencies and professional skills** and **serving as stewards to their communities and environment**.

SINCE SOLAR YOUTH'S FOUNDING IN 2000:

- Over **4,000** young people have participated in Solar Youth programs
- Over **200** teenagers have been hired and trained as co-leaders
- Solar Youth “Stewards” (participants in our programs) have completed over **230** youth-led Community Service Action Projects (C-SAPs) and nearly **150** youth-led Public Education Projects (PEPs)
- In 2011, Solar Youth was named **Organization of the Year** by the Connecticut Outdoor & Environmental Education Association.



SOLAR YOUTH PROGRAMS...

- Incorporate outdoor exploration, leadership development and community service
- Target youth with the fewest supports and resources to help them succeed
- Are offered year-round for youth of all ages, from 4 to 19
- Nurture personal and social competencies within youth
- Provide rigorous professional training for teenagers
- Help create the next generation of community and environmental stewards
- Give youth a boost in science class
- Are youth-driven
- **Are cost effective:** Solar Youth serves 500+ youth annually, all on an annual budget of \$625,000. In the coming year, with support from the State of Connecticut, Solar Youth expects to serve close to 600 youth as we expand our programs to additional low income communities in New Haven with no alternative constructive out-of-school opportunities for youth.

In the long-run, Solar Youth saves Connecticut money:

- According to the recent report, “The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth,” each youth who is neither in school nor employed “imposes – on average and compared to other youth – an **immediate taxpayer burden of \$13,900 per year and an immediate social burden of \$37,450 per year** (2011 dollars). When these “opportunity youth” reach 25, “he or she will subsequently impose a **future lifetime taxpayer burden of \$170,740 and a social burden of \$529,030.**”
- According to the Connecticut After School Network, “**every dollar invested in after school programs will save taxpayers approximately \$3**, not including the savings from reduced crime” and “**\$1.7 to \$2.3 million is saved** by putting one high-risk youth on the right path.”

Solar Youth Testimony to State of Connecticut Appropriations Committee

February 17, 2012

Kenaya Streater, age 13 (current Leader-in-Training)

Hello. My name is Kenaya and I have been a part of Solar Youth every year since I was six years old. I am now going on fourteen and I am still involved. In the time that I have been in Solar Youth I have gained a lot of experience. I have taken part in many Community Service Action Projects (we call them C-SAP's) like planting a peace garden, a butterfly garden, and Eddie's garden in tribute to a boy who was shot and killed from the neighborhood. The Service Adventure program gave me the chance to make and blaze a new trail in West Rock Ridge State Park, making it easier for people from the neighborhood to hike there. We also built a small bridge along the trail over a seasonal stream. I took part in many community clean-ups over the years. Other Solar Youth participants and I also took part in designing a new playground that Solar Youth helped get for us. As a Leader in Training, or LIT, I took the responsibility of planning and leading some of the younger program groups. During this, L.I.T. members led and planned an end of the season trip. I got the chance to help out adult educators in different groups. With Solar Youth I have been on trips that went sledding, bike riding, hiking, and cooking for the homeless. As long as Solar Youth can stay around, there are many more opportunities for me as I get older. Please help us keep our funding, and even find some more if you can, so more youth can have the benefits I have had.

Cristina Cavallieri, age 17 (current Youth Educator for Steward Team program for 9 to 13 year olds)

Solar Youth runs programs for kids starting at age 4. But they don't only focus on the little children; they also focus on their youth staff members. Being in Solar Youth is like having a second family. We teach each other and better yet, we listen to each other and we care. Solar Youth has helped me a lot. Before Solar Youth I didn't have any patience at all. I do not know how I still dared to work with kids if I had no patience whatsoever. But still, I did it and they taught me how to have patience. Solar Youth also helped me at home. I remember how my brother and I would argue every day. I learned how to talk to him and by observing how he was, I adapted to his behaviors. Right now we are closer than ever. I had the same problem with my mom. Sometimes I think that I didn't understand them because they are bipolar.

They also helped me socializing with people. Before Solar Youth, I really didn't like talking to people I wasn't comfortable with. Little by little I came out my shell. Solar Youth gave me opportunities talk to people in the community, with our children's parents or guardians. It is the best feeling ever when you don't have to hide from anyone. Right now if one of my teachers asked me, "go to that person and ask him or her this question," I would gladly do it with no problem because Solar Youth has helped me find that confidence. In fact, right now I could probably have a nice conversation with you. Solar Youth has helped me to care. Before it used to be me, me, and if there was extra it was also me. That was the old me and now that I look back, I really see how selfish I was. I didn't like helping at all, I would see someone crying in the hallway and I wouldn't stop to ask what happened, I would just keep walking because I thought, "that ain't ma problem." Now I think, "So what if it's not my problem? If you can help then help." Now I care, even if it means caring for the littlest things. One last big impact that Solar Youth has done to me is caring for the environment. Before I would just not pay attention to it. I never realized how bad we were in this world until I started going to Solar Youth. Now I know not to litter because it ends up in our water ways, and I get mad when I see people do it. Solar Youth has helped me to shape who I became and who I am today and I am very thankful. Thanks Solar Youth.

Montrell Johnson, age 17 (current Youth Educator for Citycology program for 4 to 8 year olds)

Solar Youth is a program that strives to make the lives of children better. It is the program that helped me find my future. Last fall, Solar Youth took the youth in the Green Jobs Apprenticeship program on a college tour. Before that I had no insight into getting into college. One of the colleges we visited was Fisher College. The week after we got back I applied, and in the middle of January heard that I had been accepted, and they are giving me a \$20,000 scholarship. When I told the staff at Solar Youth, everyone almost started to cry – showing how much they care about me. I have been in other programs before, but Solar Youth is different. The program opened my eyes to community, respect, friendship, and leadership. Solar Youth is important to me, my friends, and the State Of Connecticut, and should continue to remain in the State budget. Thank you!